The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents the Exhibition Colors of Kyoto: The Seifū Yohei Ceramic Studio

Thursday August 17, 2023

Bowl with Numinous Fungi and Kirin, 1893–1900. Seifū Yohei III (Japanese, 1851–1914).

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The first exhibition in North America to comprehensively examine the studio's output through four generations

PRESS KIT

CLEVELAND (August 16, 2023)—The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) is pleased to announce the opening of its newest exhibition, *Colors of Kyoto: The Seifū Yohei Ceramic Studio*, on view August 19, 2023, through Sunday, March 10, 2024, in the Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery. Showcasing works in porcelain and stoneware made by the Kyoto-based studio of Seifū Yohei from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, the exhibition debuts extraordinary gifts to the museum's collection from the James and Christine Heusinger Collection. The assemblage was strategically acquired over the past three decades with the goal of representing the full range of forms and styles produced under the

Seifū Yohei name and showcasing the work of Seifū Yohei III (1851–1914), the first ceramist to be selected as an Imperial Household Artist, in 1893.

Colors of Kyoto: The Seifū Yohei Ceramic Studio features works by members of the Seifū family that reflect the ceramics culture of Kyoto, an ancient city and former capital of Japan. The artists' engagement with Chinese forms and techniques showcased an alternative way to bring Japanese porcelain into the modern era at a time when Western cultures were leaving a major mark in Japan. The exhibition is the first in North America to comprehensively examine the studio's output from the time of its founder, Seifū Yohei I (1801–1861), through that of its fourth-generation head, Seifū Yohei IV (1871–1951).

"*Colors of Kyoto: The Seifū Yohei Ceramic Studio* will inspire visitors to discover the relevance of ceramics in Japanese art through a historical framework evocative of contemporary events and issues that impact people's lives," said Sinéad Vilbar, Janice Hammond and Edward Hemmelgarn Curator of Japanese Art. "These intricate pieces demonstrate how social, economic, and cultural factors can affect an artist's work, as well has how governments can use art to communicate cultural values and inspire national identity."

More than 400 years ago, ceramists in Japan first successfully fired porcelain, and from the mid-1600s, Japan took advantage of a gap in the global porcelain trade left by the temporary exit of China from the market, following the demise of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and the maritime prohibitions of the early Qing dynasty (1644–1912), to secure orders for its porcelains in Europe.

From the late 1800s, participation of Japanese ceramists in international expositions also became a forum for constructing national identity. While it has garnered less attention in exhibitions and publications outside Japan, there was a robust domestic market for Japanese porcelains as well, including vessels for use in sencha, or Chinese-style tea, gatherings.

The show and its catalogue also use the collection as a lens through which to analyze aspects of the modernization of Japan and to consider the history of international trade.

Exhibition Catalogue

A beautifully illustrated 200-page catalogue accompanies the exhibition, detailing the history of ceramics in Kyoto, providing biographies of artists and discussing ceramics as soft power and its role in sencha and literati culture.

Colors of Kyoto: The Seifū Yohei Ceramic Studio is funded in part with a generous award from the Japan Foundation 2023 Exhibitions Abroad Support Program.

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Complementary Programming

Lecture
Imperial Household Artist Seifū Yohei III and the Birth of Modern Japanese Ceramics
Speaker: Shinya Maezaki, Kyoto Women's University
Sunday, August 20, 2:00 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium
FREE; ticket required

Across four generations of makers from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, the Kyoto-based studio of Seifū Yohei created distinctive porcelain for both Japanese elites and global audiences. In this lecture, scholar Shinya Maezaki focuses on the life and work of artist Seifū Yohei III as a lens through which to analyze aspects of the modernization of Japan and to consider the history of international trade.

Shinya Maezaki is currently a professor at Kyoto Women's University, where he teaches art and design history. He recently authored the principal essay for Colors of Kyoto: The Seifū Yohei Ceramic Studio (2023), the publication that accompanies the exhibition of the same name on view at the CMA from August 19, 2023, through March 10, 2024. His many publications include the book Made in Kyoto (2020), for which he was coeditor, and the chapter "Unifying Science and Art: The Kyoto City Ceramic Research Institute (1896–1920) and Ceramic Art Education during the Taisho Era," in Ceramics and Modernity in Japan (2019). His 2009 doctoral dissertation for the University of London, School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), examined the life and art of ceramist Seifū Yohei III (1851–1914).

This lecture is funded in part through a generous award from the Japan Foundation's 2023 Exhibitions Abroad Support Program. Additional support was provided through gifts from Thomas Borkovic and Sharon Divell.

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